

# Unwanted Sexual Experiences at UNH:

## 2012 Study and Changes Over Time

### Introduction

National studies have found that college-age women are the highest risk group for sexual assault, and that the incidences of sexual violence, relationship violence, and stalking are high, if not the highest among college-age students (e.g., Fisher & Cullen, 2000; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2002; Shook, Gerrity, Jurich, & Segrist, 2000). There has been variability in these figures, and men also have reported unwanted sexual, relationship and stalking experiences. Thus, there is a need for estimates of the extent of these problems to inform prevention and policy initiatives on university campuses. This study was the next segment in an ongoing research collaboration at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) funded by the UNH Office of the President, conducted in 1988, 2000, and 2006. Earlier versions of this study at UNH have been helpful in shaping policy and programs to address this critical issue that impacts students' emotional, physical, and academic well-being.

This report represents the 25th anniversary of this research project. The original three panels of the study focused on unwanted sexual experiences at UNH. For the current study researchers gathered data on a wider range of unwanted experiences (sexual contact and intercourse, stalking, and physical relationship violence) among undergraduates. The findings are presented in two separate reports. This report examines the incidences of these unwanted sexual experiences among undergraduate students at UNH during the first half of the 2011-2012 academic year. Incidence was defined as the number of individuals who self-reported unwanted experiences during a six-month

period from the start of school in August 2011 until data collection in late February 2012. The study was funded by the Office of the President.

### Methods

Approval to conduct the study was granted by the UNH institutional review board for the protection of human subjects. At UNH, 40% of the entire undergraduate student body took our survey. Of the total sample, 48% of the participants completed paper surveys in a random sample of UNH undergraduate courses across colleges, and the other 52% completed a web-based survey. Numerous checks were included to minimize the chance of a student completing the survey twice. Students were told that the study was being conducted by researchers at UNH. In both versions of the survey, students were first presented with a brief statement informing them about the survey on incidence of certain types of sexual and physical experiences in relationships on campus (results specific to physical experiences and stalking are covered in a report separate from this one), about informed consent, and about the guarantee of anonymity of their answers. Students were also told that their participation was voluntary and that they could enter their name into a lottery drawing for one of five \$100 amazon.com gift cards. Participants who completed the paper surveys in class then filled out and put in a separate box their name and email address when they returned their surveys. Those who completed the survey online were directed to a separate webpage to register their name into the same lottery. This study was part of a larger web based survey of students from eight New England colleges and universities conducted by the same UNH researchers.



## Sample

Participants included in the analyses presented herein were 4,406 UNH undergraduates between the ages of 18 and 24 (mean age=19.96,  $SD=1.38$ ). Women made up 65% of the sample, and men made up 35% of the sample. Participants were roughly evenly dispersed by year in school (29% freshmen, 23% sophomores, 24% juniors, 24% seniors). The vast majority (93%) of the sample identified as Caucasian/White.

## Definition of Terms

For the purposes of the study, the following definitions appeared on the surveys that participants filled out.

“Unwanted sexual experiences are those situations in which you were certain at the time that you did not want to engage in the sexual experience and you either communicated this in some way (e.g., you said no; you protested; you said you didn’t want to; you physically struggled; you cried; etc.), or you were intimidated or forced by someone or you were incapacitated (e.g., drunk, passed out, etc.).”

“Sexual contact includes attempting or actually kissing, fondling, or touching someone in a sexually intimate way, excluding sexual intercourse.”

“Sexual intercourse refers to any form of sexual penetration including vaginal intercourse, oral sex, and anal intercourse.”

These definitions and the specific questions used to assess victimization experiences were the same across all panels of the study.

Two questions have been used to measure unwanted sexual intercourse and contact since the original 1988 study:

During this school year, how many times has someone had SEXUAL CONTACT with you WHEN YOU DIDN’T WANT to?

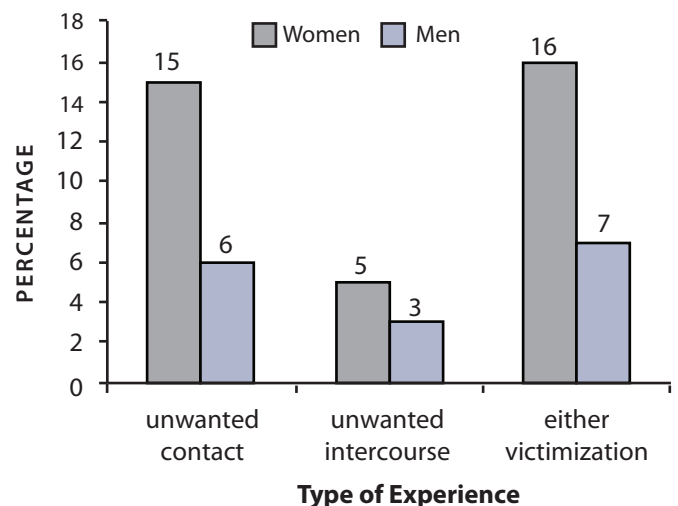
During this school year, how many times have you had SEXUAL INTERCOURSE with someone WHEN YOU DIDN’T WANT to?

Figures 1, 2A, and 2B present the data from these questions, which were developed by UNH researchers for past studies.

In addition to the two questions described above, we also assessed unwanted sexual experiences using the Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) Sexual Experiences Survey, which is a widely used measure of sexual victimization. There were three items that were included from the Koss et al. scale, and data obtained from these questions are presented in Figures 4A and 4B.

1. Since the beginning of the school year, how many times have you ever had sexual intercourse against your wishes because someone used force?
2. Apart from the previous question, since the beginning of the school year, how many times have you had sexual intercourse against your wishes because someone threatened to harm you?
3. Apart from the previous two questions, since the beginning of the school year, how many times have you had sexual intercourse when you were so intoxicated that you were unable to consent?

**FIGURE 1. Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Experiences, 2012**



## Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Experiences

The incidence of unwanted sexual experiences was calculated using the combined data from web and paper surveys collected in 2012 and is summarized for all respondents in Figure 1. Women report greater incidence with unwanted sexual experiences, and the difference between men and women with regard to unwanted sexual contact is particularly marked.

Figures 2a and 2b break down the incidence by year in school. It is often assumed that unwanted sexual experiences are especially likely to occur among first year students; these data confirm this for unwanted contact but not for unwanted intercourse. Among women, unwanted contact is highest for first- and second-year students; unwanted contact does not vary by year for men. Unwanted intercourse, in comparison, is relatively consistent across years in school among women. The unwanted intercourse numbers for men are too small to analyze by year in school.

## Changes Over Time

As mentioned above, we collected data on unwanted sexual experiences from women in 1988, 2000, 2006, and 2012 and from men in 2000, 2006, and 2012. Because the 1988 and 2000 surveys used paper, we will only use the data from the students who used paper

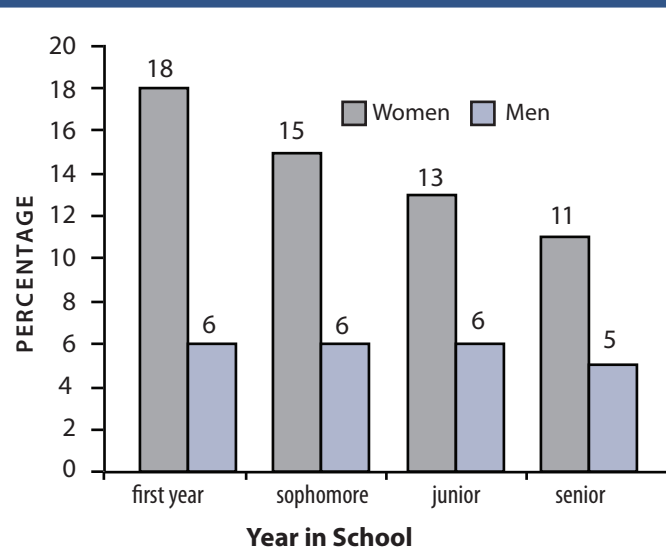
surveys in 2012 for this section. Figures 3a and 3b presented the comparison data for women and men respectively.

For women, there were significantly fewer incidents of unwanted sexual contact and either victimization in both 2000 and 2006 than 1988. Rates went down significantly from 1988 to 2000 and from 2006 to 2012 for unwanted contact and overall unwanted experiences. There was not a significant change in unwanted intercourse from 2006 to 2012. For men, there were no overall significant differences by year of the study, perhaps because differences were hard to detect with the small sample of men who were victims, though the trend for men is for decreases over time in incidence of unwanted contact.

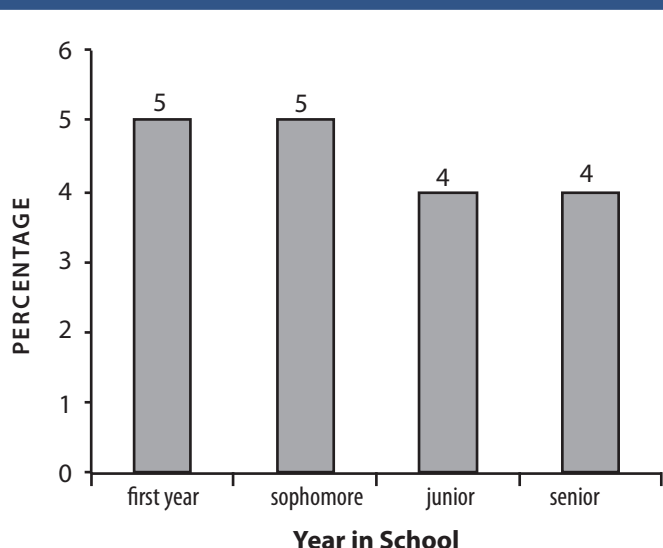
## Prevalence of Unwanted Sexual Experiences

In contrast to the incidence data presented above, the public health field also emphasizes the importance of understanding prevalence. In this regard, students answered questions about unwanted sexual experiences over a broader scope of time, including a question about whether they have ever experienced an unwanted sexual experience regardless of when it took place. Specifically, participants were asked if they had experienced unwanted intercourse as a result of someone using force or the threat of harm against

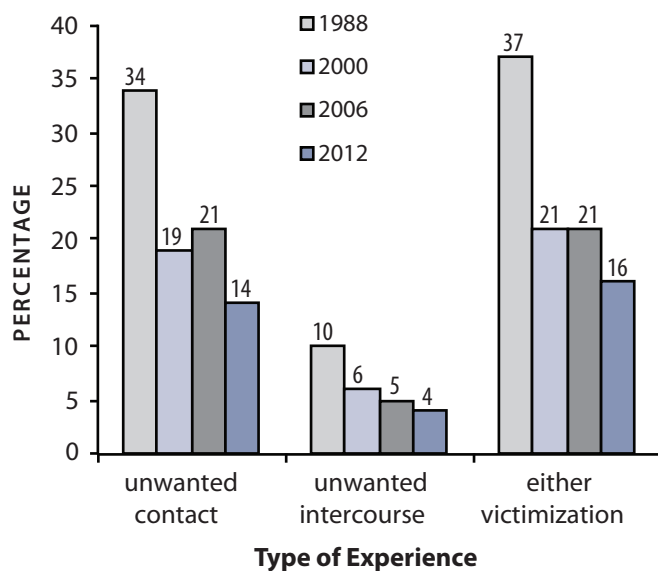
**FIGURE 2A. Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Contact by Year in School, 2012**



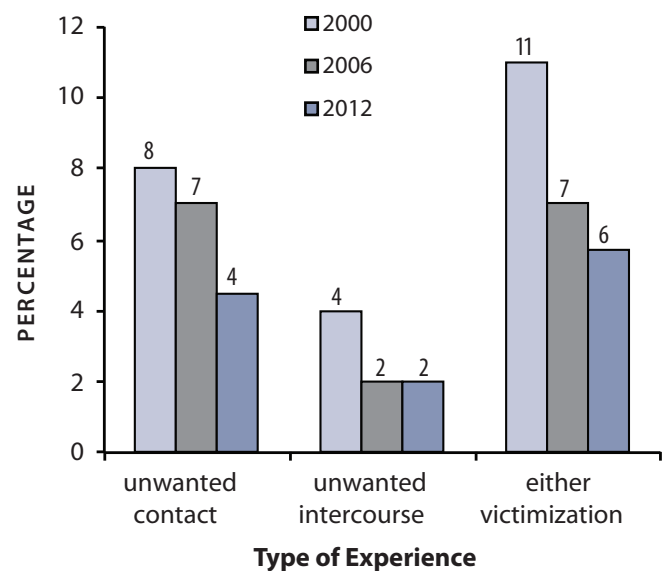
**FIGURE 2B. Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Intercourse by Year in School, Women Only, 2012**



**FIGURE 3A. Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Experiences by Year of Study, Women Only**



**FIGURE 3B. Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Experiences by Year of Study, Men Only**



them. They were also asked how often they had sexual intercourse when they were too intoxicated to give consent. The data presented in this section are from 2006 and 2012. For ease of interpretation, results of reports obtained on paper surveys and web-based surveys have been combined.

A substantial number of UNH students have past experiences with unwanted sexual experiences involving force or threat of harm. The prevalence of these experiences has declined from 2006 to 2012, which may be a result of increasing attention to these experiences and educational programming to address the issue. Women were more likely than men to report a history of unwanted sexual experiences no matter what period of time was used.

A similar pattern is found for the prevalence of having sexual intercourse when the student was too intoxicated to consent to the behavior. The prevalence declined over time, but again women reported these experiences more frequently than men did.

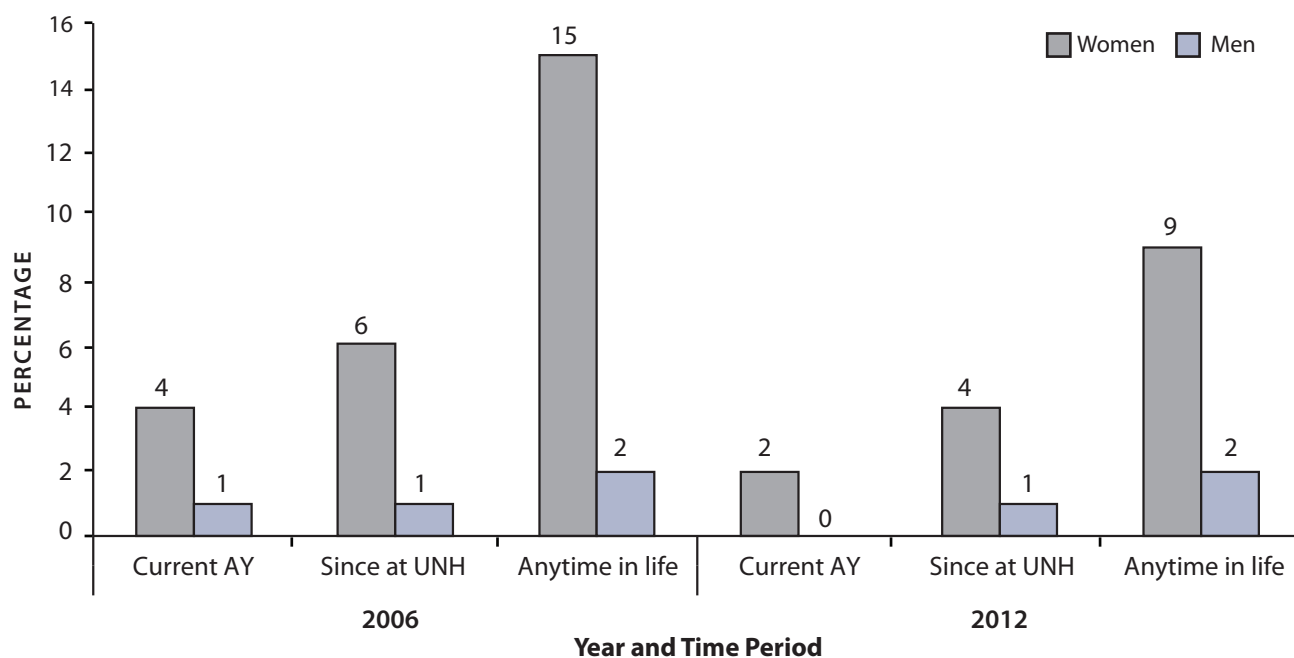
## Conclusions and Recommendations

- This report represents the 25th anniversary of this research project. UNH is a unique campus and a

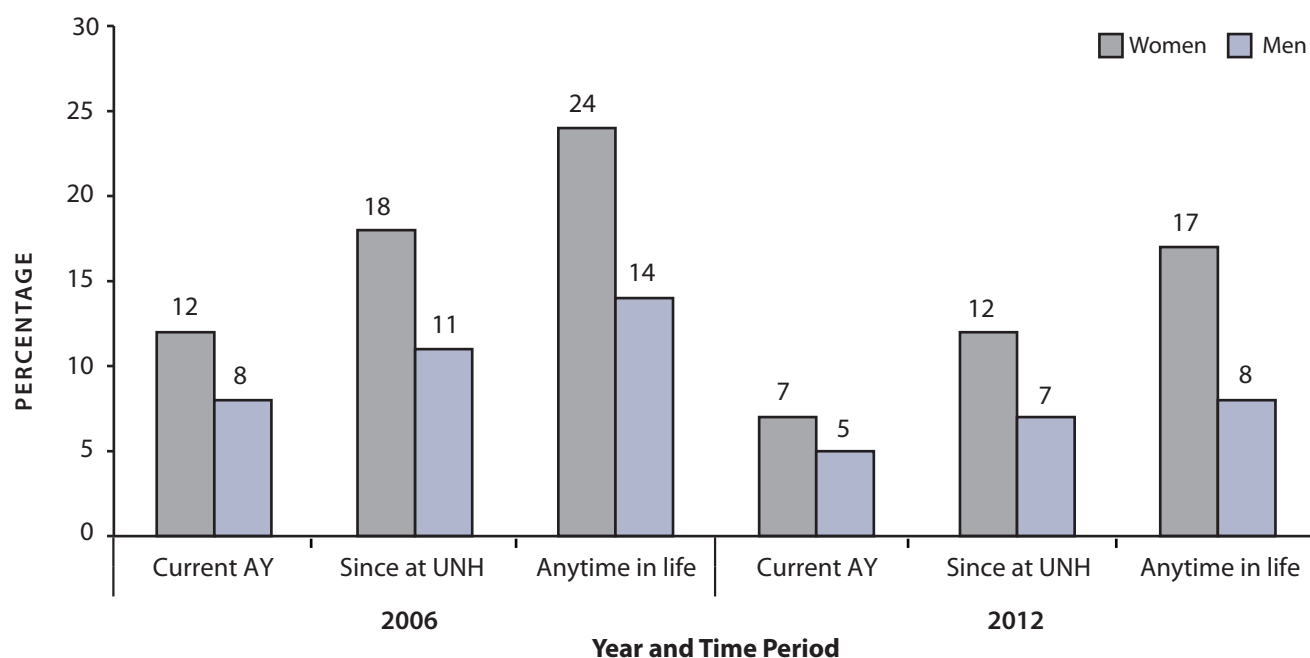
leader in that it is one of the only campuses to our knowledge that regularly and rigorously researches the incidence of unwanted sexual contact and unwanted intercourse. This data is invaluable for community planning and monitoring.

- Rates of unwanted sexual contact are declining on the UNH campus. This is good news. It is interesting that these changes reflect behaviors on the unwanted contact side of the continuum of sexual violence. We may hypothesize that this may be due to shifts in climate and community norms regarding unwanted experiences and what is appropriate. Indeed, a number of innovative efforts related to climate have taken place on the UNH campus since the 2006 survey was conducted.
  - UNH has received Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women Campus Grant money via the UNH Police Department in collaboration with the Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP), and Prevention Innovations. This grant money has focused on training, prevention materials, and community capacity building to reduce violence against women on campus.

**FIGURE 4A: Prevalence of Unwanted Sexual Intercourse:  
Perpetrator Using Force or Threat, 2006 and 2012**



**FIGURE 4B: Prevalence of Unwanted Sexual Intercourse:  
Victim Unable to Consent, 2006 and 2012**





- Further, SHARPP has engaged in many outreach and prevention efforts including expanded use of social media, improvements in their website, using the promising framework of bystander intervention (teaching all community members to identify a role to play in stopping risky situations before sexual violence occurs and supporting victims afterward) and innovative awareness campaigns such as “Friends Believe Friends.” They have done important work with UNH Athletics and fraternities and sororities and have worked to increase highly visible campus events such as the annual walk to end violence.
- UNH was also the recipient of a 4 year Centers for Disease Control grant that brought sessions of Bringing in the Bystander and the social marketing campaign Know Your Power to campus for many years in a row. The social marketing campaign in particular saturated campus with messages and examples of stepping in to prevent sexual and relationship violence.
- In April of 2011 the campus hosted a high profile visit by Vice President Biden and Secretary of Education Duncan which highlighted the need to take action to address sexual assault.
- Nationally rates of crime have been decreasing. It may be that declines in unwanted contact are part of national shifts rather than campus-specific efforts.
- Nationally there have been many high profile sexual assault cases discussed in the media including Steubenville Ohio, the University of Montana, Amherst College, and Boston University. There has also been coverage of reports on sexual assault such as those by the Center for Public Integrity. We know from research that media does impact attitudes and thus we may be seeing some effects of these media reports.
- Although a different study design would be needed to evaluate the specific effects of campus based efforts, the decline in unwanted contact in light of the variety campus efforts over the past 6 years is encouraging. More resources to encourage such innovations and to scale up the exposure of UNH community members to prevention messages are needed to keep this positive trend going. Social marketing campaigns like Know Your Power® and Friends Believe Friends must be sustained and resources are needed so that educators at SHARPP can reach all students, and faculty and staff as well, with awareness and skill building opportunities. UNH should continue to study the promise of a bystander approach to sexual and relationship violence.
- There was little change in rates of unwanted sexual intercourse, after the decrease from 1988 to 2000. This fits with work by researchers like David Lisak who find that rapes are most often committed by serial perpetrators who are relatively immune to attitude and behavior changes through prevention programming. Addressing this problem requires changes in criminal justice system responses. These responses can start at UNH, and indeed have with projects like the campus grant and ongoing work at SHARPP but ultimately must be tied to broader changes at the county and state level to more effectively investigate and prosecute offenders and remove them from the community so that they do not have ongoing opportunities to reach new victims.
- Changes in rates of unwanted experiences were found for women, but the changes for men were smaller. Reaching and serving male victims of unwanted sexual experiences continues to be a challenge for our community. Though they are fewer in number we should do more to understand their needs and experiences.
- UNH statistics are in line with national statistics about college women. The data show that one in eleven UNH undergraduate women has experienced the more severe forms of unwanted sexual experiences (e.g., force and threat of harm) in their lifetime. Two percent report this happening during the current academic year. With an enrollment figure of 6,575 female undergraduates during the semester in which the surveys were completed, we may estimate that 120 women undergraduates at

UNH suffered these severe types of unwanted sexual experiences from September to February of that academic year.

- While the decrease in incidence of unwanted sexual experiences from 1988 to now is encouraging and suggests that the many prevention and intervention services the community has put in place have made a difference, there now remains a relatively stable number of these incidents in our community each year. We need to continue to put additional time and resources into designing new forms of prevention and intervention to try to address this more stable if smaller subset of incidents.
- Students in their first years at UNH should continue to be the focus of prevention efforts since they are at high risk for unwanted sexual contact. The community should find additional ways to bring prevention programs to this audience.

### Project Collaborators

Victoria Banyard, Psychology, Justice Studies and Prevention Innovations; Ellen Cohn, Psychology and Justice Studies; Katie Edwards, Psychology, Women's Studies, and Prevention Innovations; Mary M. Moynihan, Women's Studies, Justice Studies and Prevention Innovations; Wendy Walsh, Crimes Against Children Research Center and Justice Studies; Sally Ward, Sociology.

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